

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 OMB-01 NEA-10 EB-07 TRSE-00 COME-00 XMB-02

AGR-05 /090 W

----- 046269

R 100625Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY TANANARIVE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7880

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

AMEMBASSY LOURENCO MARQUES

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TANANARIVE 0032

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, MA

SUBJ: PROSPECTS OF GDRM FOR THE FUTURE

REF: TANANARIVE 0012

SUMMARY: FOLLOWING HIS INAUGURATION JAN. 4, RATSIRAKA HAS GIVEN NO INDICATION OF MAKEUP OF NEW GOVT OR HOW HE WILL IMPLEMENT POLICIES ESTABLISHED BY NEW CHARTER AND CONSTITUTION. HE WILL DOMINATE POLICY-MAKING, EVEN THOUGH HE SPEAKS OF "DECENTRALIZATION" OF AUTHORITY. HE IS UNLIKELY TO PURSUE NATIONALIZATION AGGRESSIVELY AND MAY, IN GENERAL, AVOID MAKING EARLY DECISIONS ON URGENT DOMESTIC MATTERS. THE NEW "POPULAR ARMY", VOLUNTEERS TO WORK IN RURAL AREAS, WILL PROBABLY TAKE SHAPE SOON BUT MAY CAUSE LOCAL CONFLICTS. ECONOMIC SITUATION FULL OF UNCERTAINTIES. PRESS AND EDUCATION MAY BE TAILORED TO POLITICAL WISHES OF GDRM. IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS, RATSIRAKA SEES HIMSELF AS A LEADER OF THIRD WORLD AND IS NOT LIKELY TO ALTER HIS OFT-STATED POLICIES WHICH MOSTLY CONFLICT WITH OURS. END SUMMARY

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1. THUS FAR THERE HAVE BEEN FEW INDICATIONS OF HOW RATSIRAKA, INAUGURATED JAN. 4 AS PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC, WILL SHAPE THE NEW GOVT OR INTERNAL POLICY, SHORT-TERM OR LONG-TERM. CHARTER OF THE REPUBLIC (RATSIRAKA'S "LITTLE RED BOOK"), WHICH APPROVED BY DEC. 21 REFERENDUM, WILL BE BASIS OF POLICY BUT DOES NOT CONTAIN SPECIFICS. BUT, BY KEEPING THINGS CLOSE TO THE CHEST AS HE IS NOW DOING, WE CAN EXPECT NOTHING SHORT OF ONE-MAN RULE.

2. THERE IS EXPECTATION THAT A NUMBER OF MINISTERIAL PORTFOLIOS WILL CHANGE HANDS SHORTLY AND NEW CABINET WILL BE COMPOSED MOSTLY OF TECHNOCRATS. IN VARIOUS STATEMENTS, RATSIRAKA ALLUDED TO POSSIBILITY THAT HE MAY ENLARGE SUPREME REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL (CSR) TO INCLUDE CIVILIANS. HOWEVER, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THE NEW PRIME MINISTER (WHO-EVER HE MAY BE), CSR, OR THE NEW CABINET WILL HAVE MUCH DECISION-MAKING EFFECT ON RATSIRAKA' PROGRAM. THEY WILL SIMPLY BE CHARGED WITH ITS IMPLEMENTATION, ALTHOUGH INDIVIDUAL CSR MEMBERS MAY HAVE A MINOR ROLE IN GIVING RATSIRAKA ADVICE.

3. OBSERVERS HERE BELIEVE THAT RATSIRAKA WILL NOT AGGRESSIVELY PURSUE NATIONALIZATION FOR THE TIME BEING, ALTHOUGH HE MAY NATIONALIZE ONE OR TWO MORE CONCERNS AS A TOKEN OF HIS POLICY. HE WILL PROBABLY DEVOTE THE FIRST FEW MONTHS OF THE REGIME TOWARD SOLIDIFYING THE POLITICAL ASPECTS OF THIS NEW SOCIALIST (SO-CALLED) STATE. HE WOULD THEREBY AVOID THE URGENT ATTENTION WHICH THE ECONOMIC SECTOR NEEDS REGARDING PRIORITIES IN THE FIELDS OF FINANCE AND DEVELOPMENT. (SEE BELOW).

4. BASED ON HIS CAMPAIGN STATEMENTS AND THE "LITTLE RED BOOK", RATSIRAKA AND THE MILITARY COMMAND, ACTING THROUGH THE PROVINCE CHIEFS, WILL PROBABLY MOVE AHEAD QUICKLY TO ESTABLISH THE NEW "POPULAR ARMY" OF VOLUNTEERS TO WORK IN RURAL AREAS, MUCH THE SAME AS CADRE TEAMS IN CHINA AND ELSEWHERE. POPULAR ARMY UNITS WILL ATTEMPT TO INFUSE THE RURAL POPULATION WITH THE SPIRIT OF THE NEW REVOLUTION. THE ATTEMPT WILL BE MADE THROUGH THE FOKOLONA, THE TRADITIONAL VILLAGE COUNCILS WHICH HAVE BEEN REBORN, GLAMORIZED BUT FIVEN LITTLE POWER SINCE THE FALL OF THE TSIRANANA GOVT IN 1972 AS PART OF THE COSMETIC ATTEMPT TO "DECENTRALIZE" POWER. THEREIN LIE SEEDS OF CONFLICT. YOUNG, AGGRESSIVE POPULAR
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ARMY MEMBERS ARE NOT LIKELY TO VIEW REGIONAL AFFAIRS IN THE SAME WAY AS VILLAGE ELDERS OF THE FOKOLONA, EVEN IF POPULAR ARMY MEMBERS SERVE IN THEIR OWN REGIONS AS IS EXPECTED.

5. MOREOVER, DESPITE HIS VERBIAGE ON "DECENTARLIZATION" OF THE GOVT., RATSIRAKA'S ONE-MAN LEADERSHIP IS ALMOST CERTAIN TO INDUCE MORE CENTRALIZATION RATHER THAN LESS. AS WE HAVE SEEN DURING THE SEVEN MONTHS SINCE HE FIRST CAME TO POWER, THERE HAS BEEN A STAG-

NATION IN THE OPERATION OF THE GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES. MOST CIVIL SERVANTS ARE UNABLE OR UNWILLING TO FUNCTION EFFECTIVELY, BEING AWARE THAT THE PRESIDENCY HAS OFTEN DECIDED THE SMALL DETAILS (AT THE EXPENSE OF MORE FUNDAMENTAL, MORE FAR-REACHING AND MORE URGENT DECISIONS). IN ADDITION, MANY CIVIL SERVANTS FEAR BEING TRANSFERRED TO RURAL AREAS IN SUPPORT OF THE POPULAR ARMY.

6. IN GENERAL, THE ECONOMIC SITUATION DOES NOT LOOK HEALTHY. THIS YEAR'S RICE CROP IS EXPECTED TO BE SOMEWHAT LOWER THAN LAST YEAR'S RECORD HARVEST, PRIMARILY AS A RESULT OF TWO FACTORS. FIRST, THE DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM HAS BEEN DISRUPTED BY THE GOVT'S TAKEOVER OF THE RICE TRADE FROM THE ESTABLISHED MIDDLE-MEN, EITHER FRENCH, CHINESE OR INDIAN, WHO ALWAYS INSURED THE TIMELY DELIVERY OF GOODS TO THE MARKET PLACE. SECOND, GOVT NATIONALIZATION OF THE RICE TRADE HAS ALSO MEANT THAT PAYMENTS TO THE FARMERS HAVE FREQUENTLY BEEN LATE, THEREBY DISCOURAGING FARMERS FROM EXPANDING PRODUCTION. NEW PRIVATE INVESTMENT OF ANY SIZE HAS BEEN SLIGHT OWING TO HEAVY-HANDED GOVERNMENT CONTROL AND UNCERTAINTY RE NEW GOVT POLICIES VIS-A-VIS THE PRIVATE SECTOR.

7. ON THE FINANCIAL SIDE, THE GOVT MUST MAKE SOME URGENT DECISIONS ON HOW IT WILL PROTECT ITS FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES BY CONTROLLING THE IMPORT MARKET. SOME PRIVATE COMPANIES HAVE HAD DIFFICULTY IN OBTAINING PAYMENTS FROM THE GOVT AND, AS A DIRECT CONSEQUENCE, HAVE ALSO HAD DIFFICULTY IN OBTAINING LETTERS OF CREDIT FROM ABROAD.

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USIA-06 OMB-01 NEA-10 EB-07 TRSE-00 COME-00 XMB-02

AGR-05 /090 W

----- 046351

R 100625Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY TANANARIVE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7881

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

AMEMBASSY LOURENCO MARQUES
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8. CONTROL OVER THE THOUGHT PROCESSES OF THE NATION IS CERTAIN TO BE ANOTHER IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF THE NEW GOVT'S POLICY. CURRENT CONTROLS ON THE PRESS ARE NOT LIKELY TO BE RELAXED SO THAT WE WILL CONTINUE TO SEE POOR NEWS COVERAGE, BOTH NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL, SINCE GDRM AUTHORITIES ARE NOT TOLERANT OF CERTAIN SUBJECTS APPEARING IN PRINT. IN THE PAST, THERE HAVE BEEN A FEW CONFISCATIONS OF SINGLE ISSUES OF VARIOUS NEWSPAPERS. WHETHER PRESS CONTROLS FOLLOW THE ROUTE OF THE TOTALLY NATIONALIZED RAIDO AND TV SYSTEM REMAINS TO BE SEEN. SOME NEWSPAPERS HAVE BEEN CLEVER IN PRINTING SUGGESTIVE ARTICLES BUT THERE IS, TO BE SURE, NO EFFECTIVE MEANS THROUGH THE MEDIA OF OPPOSING THE GOVT OR ITS POLICIES. THE GOVERNMENT'S NEWS AGENCY, MADAGASCAR PRESS, STILL MAINTAINS A REASONABLE AMOUNT OF AUTONOMY. ITS CIRCULATION IS SMALL (800) BUT IT SETS THE STANDARD BY WHICH THE OTHER NEWSPAPERS JUDGE HOW FAR THEY CAN GO. THE GOVT COULD, CONCEIVABLY, UTILIZE THIS PUBLICATION TO FORCE THE OTHER NEWSPAPERS TO FOLLOW A MORE PRO-GOVT LINE.

9. IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION, IT WAS ANNOUNCED JAN. 8 THAT
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CLASSES WOULD RESUME FEB. 2 (DEC.-JAN. ARE THE SUMMER VACATION MONTHS HERE). FACULTIES OF THE SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES ARE ENGAGED UNTIL THEN IN ADOPTING CURRICULA TO THE DICTATES OF THE LITTLE RED BOOK. IT IS DIFFICULT TO PREDICT NOW HOW THIS WILL AFFECT THE LEVEL OF LEARNING OF THE MALAGASY STUDENT BODY. AT ITS UPPER LEVELS, EDUCATION HERE DEPENDS HEAVILY ON FOREIGN FACULTY FOR TECHNICAL SUBJECTS. WE HAVE AS YET DISCERNED NO PRESSURE ON FOREIGN FACULTY EITHER TO DEPART OR TO CONFORM TO THE REVOLUTION.

10. THE NEW CONSTITUTION PROVIDES THAT CITIZENS MAY "UNITE FREELY IN THE NATIONAL FRONT FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE REVOLUTION" WHICH IS TO WORK TOWARDS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SOCIALISM. FRONT'S POWERS AND ORGANIZATION ARE TO BE DETERMINED BY LAW. ALTHOUGH THE CONSTITUTION DOES NOT FURTHER CLARIFY THE ROLE OF THE FRONT, IT IS CLEARLY AN ATTEMPT BY THE GOVT TO CONTROL EVENTUALLY ALL ORGANIZED POLITICAL ACTIVITY. THE MARXIST AKFM PARTY BASED IN TANANARIVE AND THE RADICAL LEFTIST MONIMA PARTY BASED IN THE COASTAL CITY OF TULEAR, BOTH OF WHICH ARE ACTIVE IN SUPPORT OF THE GOVT BUT NEITHER OF WHICH HAS A LARGE MEMBERSHIP, WILL PROBABLY FORM THE NUCLEUS OF THE FRONT. TSIRANANA'S OLD SOCIALIST PARTY (PSM) IS LIKELY TO REFRAIN FROM JOINING THE FRONT AS A UNIT BECAUSE OF ITS LEADERS' TOTAL OPPOSITION TO RATSIRAKA AND THE NEW

GDRM. HOWEVER, THE PSM MAY BE FACED WITH THE CHOICE OF OFFICIALLLY JOINING THE FRONT OR GOING OUT OF BUSINESS. IT WAS INEFFECTIVE DURING THE RECENT ELECTORIAL CAMPAIGN PRIMARILY BECAUSE OF ITS INABILITY TO GAIN ACCESS TO THE MEDIA.

11. RATSIRAKA HAS MADE FREQUENT REFERENCES TO THE THREAT TO MADAGASCAR'S SECURITY FROM EXTERNAL SOURCES AND THE POSSIBILITY OF CIVIL WAR, AS DURING THE "EVENTS" OF EARLY 1975. HIS VIEWS ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS IN GENERAL, MADE IN HIS INAUGURAL SPEECHES, WERE REPORTED REFTEL. THESE ISSUES ARE FUNDAMENTAL ONLY IN RATSIRAKA'S CONCEPTION OF POWER. HE WISHES TO MAINTAIN HIS SANDING WITH OTHER THIRD WORLD LEADERS AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS IS MORE CON- GENIAL TO HIM THAN WRESTLING WITH COMPLEX INTERNAL ECONOMIC MATTERS WHICH HE MAY OR MAY NOT FATHOM. IN ADDITION, BECAUSE THE MALAGASY ARE A GENTLE PEOPLE, HE HAS PROVIDED THE ACITIVIST YOUTH WITH AN EASY TARGET AS A DIVERSION FROM INTERNAL PROBLEMS. ON THE OTHER HAND, AT HIS INAUGURATION RATSIRAKA REQUESTED THAT THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS TRANSMIT TO ALL THEIR CHIEFS OF STATE
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HIS SINCEREST WISHES FOR THE WELL-BEING, PROSPERITY AND SUCCESS FOR THEMSELVES, THEIR GOVERNMENTS AND THEIR PEOPLE.

12. AS FOR THE US INTEREST IN MADAGASCAR, RATSIRAKA HAS AT NO TIME DURING THE PAST SEVEN MONTHS MADE ANY GESTURES OF CONCILIATION FOR OUR DIFFERING VIEWS. HE IS NOT LIKELY TO BACK DOWN ON THE NASA STATION, AT LEAST NOT PUBLICLY, AND THE STALEMATE MAY NEVER, TECHNICALLY, BE RESOLVED, WHETHER OR NOT WE EVENTUALLY RECOVER SOME OR ALL OF OUR EQUIPMENT. ON THE OTHER HAND, HE HAS NOT HARASSED OUR FEW BUSINESSMEN HERE, ALTHOUGH THE OPPORTUNITY FOR DOING BUSINESS IS GENERALLY MORE DIFFICULT. GDRM HARASSMENT OF SOME OF OUR MISSIONARIES IS PROBABLY NOT RELATED TO THEIR NATIONALITY BUT TO SUSPICION, AS IN MOZAMBIQUE, THAT MISSIONARIES IN GENERAL ARE A MEANS OF SUBVERSION.

13. HE WILL CONTINUE, WE MAY BE SURE, TO CHAMPION THE CAUSES OF SOCIALISM AND LIBERATION MOVEMENTS, AS WELL AS OPPOSITION TO MILITARY BASES (READ WESTERN MILITARY BASES) IN THE INDIAN OCEAN. HE IS ANTI-CAPITALIST BUT HE PROBABLY RECOGNIZES THAT HE CANNOT PRECIPITOUSLY NATIONALIZE THE REMAINING FRENCH INVESTMENTS HERE WITHOUT RISKING SEVERE ECONOMIC DISLOCATIONS WHICH COULD IN TURN JEOPARDIZE HIS POLITICAL FUTURE. AS PART OF HIS "OMNI"DIRECTIONAL" POLICY, HE HAS BEEN RECEPTIVE TO AID FROM JAPAN, ITALY, THE FRG, THE SWISS AND THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES WHO HAVE FOUND, AS HAVE THE SOVIETS AND CHINESE, THAT DOING BUSINESS WITH THE GDRM IS A PAINSTAKING TASK.

14. AS THE DEPT KNOWS, THE GDRM VOTING RECORD IN THE UN IS REGID AND OPPOSITE TO OUR VIEWS ON MOST MAJOR ISSUES. ELEMENTS WITHIN THE ADMINISTRATION DO NOT AGREE WITH GDRM POLICIES BUT

THIS ONE-MAN SHOW LEAVES NO ROOM FOR OPPOSITION EVEN WITHIN THE
INNER CIRCLE. WE CANNOT EXPECT ANY CHANGES IN RATSIRAKA'S VIEW
OF THE WORLD IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE. HOWEVER, HE IS AN IMPETUOUS
MAN, AND WE SHOULD NOT GIVE HIM CAUSE TO FURTHER RESTRICT US-
GDRM RELATIONS WHICH WOULD NOT REALLY BENEFIT HIM IN ANY WAY BUT
WOULD CUT US OFF FROM MASSAGING THE VAST AMOUNT OF GOOD-WILL
TOWARD US THAT EXISTS HERE.SHEINBAUM

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: INAUGURATION, CONSTITUTION, PERSONNEL APPOINTMENTS, PROGRAMS (PROJECTS), POLITICAL TRENDS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 10 JAN 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: CunninFX
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976TANANA00032
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760009-0877
From: TANANARIVE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760168/aaaacift.tel
Line Count: 284
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 6
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 TANANARIVE 12
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: CunninFX
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <19 APR 2004 by SmithRJ>; APPROVED <16 AUG 2004 by CunninFX>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PROSPECTS OF GDRM FOR THE FUTURE
TAGS: PINT, MA, (RATSIRAKA, DIDIER)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006